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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: promoting full employment and decent work for all

Statement submitted by Coalition against Trafficking in Women, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, Congregations of St. Joseph, Dominican Leadership Conference, Grail, International Association of Schools of Social Work, International Council of Jewish Women, International Federation of Women in Legal Careers, International Federation of Women Lawyers, International Kolping Society, International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation, Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, Maryknóll Sisters of St. Dominic, Pax Christi International, School Sisters of Notre Dame, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries, Soroptimist International, Teresian Association and UNANIMA International, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 2006.

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Statement

1. On priority theme **Full Employment and Decent Work for All**, we NGOs, emphasize that:

Decent work is a fundamental human pursuit that is part of the inalienable dignity of all people. Each person's ability to engage in meaningful and creative work ought to be bound by a commitment to human rights. The state has a major responsibility in ensuring decent work and protecting human rights.

2. Employment is a means of regulating the economic aspects of work and pertains to the social good. The state has a responsibility in ensuring that employment benefits all sectors of society, including women, youth, rural populations, minorities, migrants and immigrant populations.

3. Employment is an occasion to reflect the gifts, talents, and contributions of each person to the common good. Proper work is an enhancement of the human person; workers should be able to earn a living wage with adequate benefits and be employed in working conditions that comply with human rights standards such as a living wage, safety in the workplace, an environment free from sexual harassment and discrimination, and family friendly work policies.

4. We express special concern to the 45th Commission on Social Development that women and girls are discriminated against in relation to work and employment; they receive neither full social protection nor the assurance of human rights. Especially heinous is the susceptibility that girls and women face from sexual exploitation in the workplace.

5. We note that:

There is a growing global industry that prostitutes and sexually exploits girls and women, often referred to as commercial sexual exploitation. Many claim this to be decent work. We note with sadness that even the ILO has grouped the prostitution of children with "worst forms of labor", rather than as a stark human rights violation.[1] We reject the notion that the purchased use of women for sexual demand is related to employment or work.

6. Governments benefit economically from the sexual exploitation of women and girls, through increased taxes, where this human rights violation is legal, and through income from tourism, where the prostitution of women may be illegal but continues to flourish due to tolerance and corruption. Governments must be accountable for any complicity in gender discrimination.

7. The largest employment category for girls under 16 is domestic work.[2] This constitutes a dangerous environment, most often without regulation or protection.

8. According to a recently released United Nations study, child workers across the globe report maltreatment that includes physical punishment, humiliation and

[1] ILO Convention No. 182: Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999.

[2] Child Labour: Targeting the Intolerable, Report submitted to the 86th Session of Int. Labour Conf., Geneva ILO Office 1998.

sexual harassment. Additionally, "girls are subject to sexual violence from male members of the family of their employer".[3]

9. A study in Kenya demonstrates that over 75 per cent of girls interviewed felt that the practice of commercial sex tourism is a "normal and an acceptable means to earn a living."[4] The experiences of our NGOs oblige us to assume that this attitude is widespread across all regions.

10. Current patterns of migration have exacerbated the vulnerabilities of women and girls to exploitation as they attempt to participate in work and employment. Of special note is the rise of international trafficking of women for sexual exploitation, estimated to affect at least 1.2 million persons each year, up to half of whom are children.[5] This phenomenon is "driven by demand and fuelled by poverty".[6]

11. Women are overrepresented and often trapped in the informal and unpaid, non-wage work sectors, including home-based work, child and eldercare, self-employment, and temporary employment. Those in the informal economy have meager access to clean water, electricity and social services; they are more vulnerable to property loss and disability; and have less access to financial, physical and other productive assets.[7]

12. We believe that these conditions, deteriorating in our time despite the Millennium Development Goals, shame persons of goodwill and conscience. They can be changed, however, by strong commitments of governments to the implementation of national and international agreements, particularly those articulated by the Beijing Platform for Action and the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action.

13. We agree with the United Nations Special Rapporteur that the "lack of rights afforded to women serves as the primary causative factor at the root of both migration and trafficking". Therefore polices that ensure the human rights of girls and women, that are subject to gender analyses, and that eradicate traditional practices of male domination can ensure decent work and fair employment for women and girls while enhancing the social cohesion and security of nations.

14. We know that where commitment and resources have been directed, progress has been made. This is particularly true where Micro Enterprise programmes in conjunction with education, have had great success in empowering women, not only economically but in all aspects of human development and social participation. Of particular note is Handcrafting Justice, an international Fair Trade project of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, developed in cooperation with women struggling for economic justice and independence in the developing world. http://www.handcraftingjustice.org/index.php?lang=en&pt=c&p=aboutUs. Sadly such programmes tend to be underfunded and often lack essential partnership with governments.

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[3] United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence Against Children, Prof. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, A/61/299, August 2006.

[4] Kenya: Study Targets Child Sex Tourism, The Nation (Nairobi), September 14, 2006.

[5] UNFPA, State of the World Population Report: Selling Hope and Stealing Dreams, June 2006.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Director, UNIFEM: 2 September 2005 International Herald Tribune.

15. We have also seen a decline in the use of women for sexual exploitation in places where governments have named the abuse and criminalized those who prostitute women, such as happens in Sweden.

16. **Building on such knowledge and practice, we note urgent enabling conditions to support full employment and decent work for women:**

Full universal education for girl children, with girls' participation in developing programmes;

Practical allocation of resources from States to eradicate all forms of violence against women and girls and to ensure full social inclusion of women and girls, including the development of strategies to change cultural practices which discriminate against gender;

Regular evaluation of legal instruments, social policies and practices that discriminate against women, with commitment to change such practices and promulgate a social guarantee for gender inclusion;

Decriminalization of women who are prostituted;

Legal sanctions against those who purchase women or girls for sexual use;

Access to affordable childcare in order to reduce barriers to participation in the formal economic sector;

Recognition of informal sector labour as both work and employment that adds value to the social good; policies ought to promote micro levels of development with participation and decision-making by women, as well as the inclusion of women on macro level policy development;

Government partnership with NGOs that develop competent microenterprise activities within grassroots communities;

Review of migration policies, building on the High level Dialogue of September 2006, with a commitment to assist in gender-specific integration of migrants into the country of destination;

State actions directed to halt human trafficking and the smuggling of persons.

17. **We support all implementation of social and economic polices that keep the human person at the centre and as priority. Our NGOs are ready to partner with governments in the implementation of policies that support gender equality, especially in relation to work and employment.**